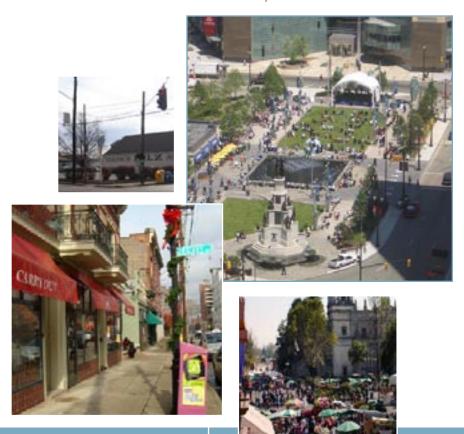


# Creating a Great Civic Square FOR COVINGTON, KENTUCKY



#### **PREPARED BY**

PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES, INC.

#### **PREPARED FOR**

THE CITY OF COVINGTON, KY RENAISSANCE COVINGTON



#### **PREPARED BY**



Steve Davies, Project Lead Chris Heitmann, Project Manager Wayken Shaw, Landscape Architect Carly Clark, Art Director Josh Jackson, Intern

#### PREPARED FOR

THE CITY OF COVINGTON, KY RENAISSANCE COVINGTON

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

"...the proposed square would preserve the existing historic structures; be a venue for a variety of activities and uses, including socializing, eating and drinking, civic and cultural events, shopping, people-watching, or just sitting and relaxing..."

n the spring of 2006, Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (PPS) conducted a public visioning and planning process for a public market in downtown Covington. That process led to additional visioning and planning in the fall of 2006 by PPS and project stakeholders focused on creating a civic square on the Times Star Commons block bordered by East 4th and 5th Streets and by Madison Avenue and Scott Boulevard. This report lays out the vision for that square and includes both short-term and long-term recommendations for its creation and management.

Central to the vision are the notions that the proposed square would preserve the existing historic structures; be a venue for a variety of activities and uses, including socializing, eating and drinking, civic and cultural events, shopping, people-watching, or just sitting and relaxing; and include perhaps both indoor and outdoor market activity.

The proposed site for the square boasts tremendous assets: a convenient location, easy access by car, foot, and transit; nearby retail, employment centers and other destinations; centered in downtown's revitalization and historic preservation efforts; substantial size and potential openness; the existing alleys; the vacant Wenzel Building at its center; a variety of engaged stakeholders; and excellent timing to move this project forward.

Challenges to implementing this vision include: fast and heavy traffic along E. 4th and 5th Streets; one-way traffic along Scott Boulevard; overall poor pedestrian experience on surrounding streets; a dearth of transit options; poor perception of safety; poor visibility into the site from two corners; the need for unity and a like-minded vision among stakeholders; the need to relocate a small number of existing businesses; and the need to coordinate public and private interests.

Potential users of the square should draw from the full spectrum of the city's diverse population, including local residents; downtown workers and shoppers; visitors to the city (e.g. convention-goers); library users; school children and youth; senior citizens; church-goers; wedding district clientele; visitors to city and county offices; bicyclists; local college students; artists; and ultimately its own users – "square-goers".

A wide array of events, recreation, and food-related activities were envisioned for the square, creating in essence, a "living room" for the city. Examples include musical and theater performances; outdoor movies; cultural events; rotating displays and exhibits; a farmers' market; eating ice cream and/or meals; drinking coffee; roller & ice skating; library-programmed activities; games for seniors and kids; cornhole; chess and checkers; painting and dance classes; celebrations; shopping; reading and relaxing; people-watching and socializing.

The major features and amenities envisioned would give the square its identity, attract people and support the desired activities: decorative and interactive fountains; public seating; a well-planted and overall "green" environment; paved/cobblestoned hardscape; public

art (e.g. mosaics, sculptures); restrooms; sheltered areas; appropriate lighting; historical markers; and drinking fountains. Recreational facilities and amenities should accommodate year-round activities (e.g. open lawn/skating rink, playground, etc.). Cultural facilities might include an outdoor movie screen and performance stage. Shops and businesses (e.g. storefronts, open-air or indoor markets, concession stands, vending carts/kiosks, etc.) should include places to eat and drink as well as other businesses.

A variety of ways were envisioned to make the square more accessible by foot, bicycle and transit and to make it more ADA-friendly, multiple traffic-calming options to slow traffic and improve the pedestrian environment; flexibility in design balancing safety for users and truck access for existing businesses; improved transit amenities (e.g. bus stops); new street car/trolley lines; bicycle lanes and racks; and reverse-in angle parking on surrounding streets. The square's plan should also consider both physical and programmatic means to increase the square's visibility from and connectivity to other popular destinations in the area.

The ideal layout for the square would stretch diagonally from E. 4th and Madison to E. 5th and Scott, with relocation of a small number of existing businesses necessary to maximize the size and shape of the square.

Short-term improvements were suggested to test some of the envisioned concepts over the next six months and to generate greater momentum for the project. A variety of potential public and private partnerships were also suggested to facilitate implementation.

#### PPS' recommendations for the project are to:

- 1. Design the square around the site's four quadrants;
- Develop the northwest quadrant/PNC Bank site as a Market Square, with a market shed and possible indoor market hall, indoor/outdoor eating areas, a small performance area, gateway feature, and fountain;
- 3. Create a park-like Green on the southeast quadrant of the block, including a large flexible lawn for a play and recreation area, seating for performances, and skating rink in winter; a permanent stage for performances; a pergola/shade structure along the edges; some eating options; and a fountain or other focal point;
- 4. Use the centrally-located Wenzel Building as a Community Center and activity base for the square and design a Central Plaza with a fountain;
- Create a flexible hardscape on the west side of the northeast quadrant, with potential as a future mixed-use development;
- Phase development of the square by quadrant, depending on business relocation and site acquisition efforts;
- 7. Calm traffic through a variety of measures: convert Scott Boulevard to two-way traffic; back-in angle parking on E. 4th and 5th Streets and on Scott; resurfaced alleys extending to mid-block crosswalks; more amenable bus shelters; and crosswalks and bumpouts at all four corners of the square; and
- 8. Create physical and programmatic connections to the square to attract visitors on the local and regional level. (e.g. through bike routes, marketing campaigns, targeted programming, etc.).

#### **Short-term implementation steps are to:**

- Create a "block party" event to pilot the idea of a civic square for the city and galvanize support from potential partners;
- Conduct a feasibility study for open-air, shed and indoor markets for the square;
- Conduct a traffic study to determine the effect proposed changes will have on traffic; conduct a parking study as well to gauge impact in that arena; and
- Conduct more extensive outreach and public input into the process.

#### Long-term implementation steps are to:

- Relocate the necessary businesses and begin site acquisition;
- Evolve the steering committee into a more formal management structure; and
- Develop a long-term strategic financing plan.



The "Times Star Commons" block, site of the proposed civic square.

#### INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2006, Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (PPS) conducted a visioning and planning process for a public market in downtown Covington. As part of that process, it was determined that the next phase would be to shape a larger vision for a central civic square for downtown, which would be a venue for a variety of activities and uses, including perhaps both indoor and outdoor market activity. It was determined that:

- The Times Star Commons block, the one-block square area bordered by East 4th and 5th Streets and by Madison Avenue and Scott Boulevard, is the best place for a public square in downtown;
- A public market should be part of the square (starting with an open-air market);
- Existing historic buildings should be preserved and adaptively re-used; and
- The broad community should be involved in creating a vision for the block.

Participants envisioned the square as a place to eat dinner; meet a friend for coffee or a drink; have fun and be entertained; celebrate civic events; shop and browse – especially in a public market; sit and relax; and enjoy life!

To expand on that initial vision, PPS returned in November 2006 to conduct a public placemaking and visioning workshop, hosted by Renaissance Covington and the City of Covington, and focused on creating a civic square in downtown Covington. More than 50 people attended the workshop, representing city agencies, nearby business and property owners, houses of worship, civic institutions, such as the library, and residents.

Following a presentation by PPS on the qualities of successful places and civic squares, participants broke



Workshop participants in November 2006.

into small groups and evaluated the "Times Star block," using the Place Performance Evaluation Game (the Place Game)©.

In addition to exploring the site's existing assets and challenges to developing a square there, participants brainstormed its potential in terms of:

- Who might use the square;
- Pedestrian, bicycle and transit access to the square;
- A variety of uses and activities for the square;
- Design features and amenities, as relating to comfort and image; and
- Physical and programmatic connections to other places and institutions in Covington.

Finally, participants discussed possible short-term improvements to the site that could be implemented as early as summer 2007, as well as larger scale, long-term improvements and infrastructure.

Building on the June 2006 report, this paper summarizes the most recent workshop and lays out recom-



mendations and next steps for an overall direction and implementation strategy for the square.

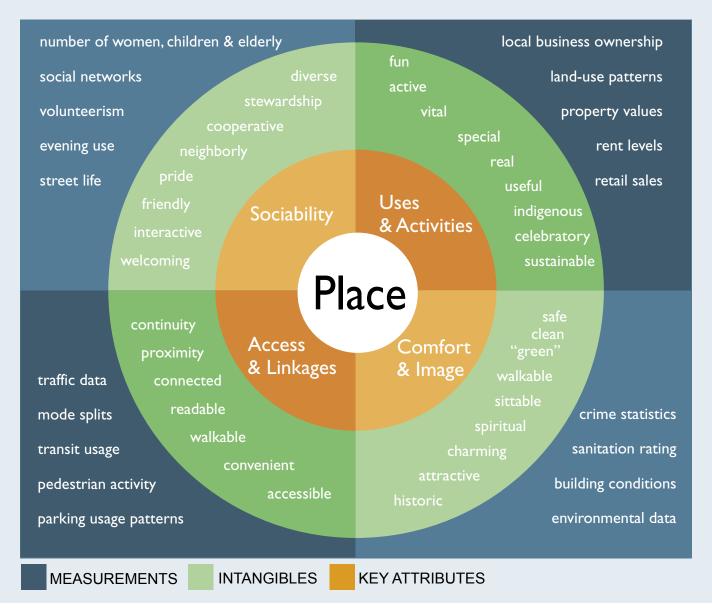
Evaluating the Times Star Commons site.

#### WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?

"It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished." – WILLIAM H. WHYTE

A great public space is like a magnet for people. People go there not only because they must pass through on business, but because it is just pleasant to be there. They are drawn by – what? What makes an otherwise ordinary plaza, street or square into a magnet for people?

In over 30 years studying public spaces, PPS has found that four key attributes typically characterize a great place:



The first of these is **Comfort and Image:** users describe the space as "safe", "clean", "green", "charming", "attractive" and "historic". There is comfortable seating; the space feels sheltering and comfortably scaled; walking into and through the space is appealing.

The second feature of a good public space is a variety of **Uses and Activities** that make the space interesting. Users describe the space as "fun", "special", "vital" and "real". Food vending and other retail activities may go on in the space; celebrations occur; children play there.









A third attribute is **Access and Linkage:** that is, the space is visibly connected to other spaces, to transit facilities, to streets, to parking. There are no dead ends; the function and connections can be understood at a glance, and the space is designed and located for convenience.

And last, a good public space has **Sociability:** the elderly sit and gossip; chess or other board games are ongoing activities; people meet acquaintances and stop to visit; there is a sense of ownership and pride in the place.

### **ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL SQUARES**







#### 1. Flexibility in Design

- Overlapping and changing uses
- Form supports function
- Experiments with low-cost improvements

#### 2. Amenity & Image

- Comfortable places to sit
- Attracts a cross-section of users
- Source of local/regional civic pride and ownership

#### 3. Management: Central to the Solution

- Management presence through:
- Security
- Maintenance
- Knowledgeable and accessible staff
- Ongoing visible improvement efforts

#### 4. Seasonal Strategies

• Flower Show, Skating Rink, Fashion Show, Holiday Market, Play Equipment, Cultural Events

#### 5. Traffic, Transit & the Pedestrian

- Connected to adjacent areas
- Range of transportation options
- Vehicles do not dominate

#### 6. The Inner Park & the Outer Park

- Active edge uses
- Gateways and entrances
- Focal points inside

#### 7. Attractions & Destinations

- Choices of things to do
- Triangulation opportunities
- Clustered activity around destinations
- 10 + Places

#### 8. Identity & Information

- Showcases local assets, culture and civic identity
- Contextual signage
- Educational opportunities





#### **WORKSHOP SUMMARY**

#### **EXISTING ASSETS**

#### Location, Location

The proposed site of the square between Madison and Scott and W. 4th and W. 5th is centrally and conveniently located in downtown, adjacent to a diversity of existing uses, activities, and places on a walkable scale, including the main branch of the Kenton County Public Library; Two Rivers Middle School; major employment centers, such as the IRS and city and county offices; restaurants and other businesses; Trinity Church; and numerous recently restored historic buildings.

Access to the site is excellent, with numerous arterial roads, transit stops, and ample on-street and public garage parking along its perimeter.

The site is also within walking distance of many of Covington's other major attractions, including the Northern Kentucky Convention Center and downtown hotels; city and county buildings; rivers and bridges; MainStrasse; senior centers; the Covington Arts District; Wedding District; and the Baker-Hunt Arts & Cultural Center.



Madison Ave.



The Times Star Building



The Ice House



IRS Building



MainStrasse



Local Destinations



The Wedding District

#### **Existing Infrastructure of the Site**

The potential site itself boasts a number of assets, among them:

- Its size and potential openness;
- Alley system criss-crossing the site;
- Wenzel Building in center of the site;
- Bus stops along the perimeter
- Major arterial roads on four sides.

#### **Timing**

Given the site's position in the heart of Covington's growing revitalization and redevelopment efforts, the timing is right for creating a new civic square downtown. Recent changes adjacent to the site include a new bar/jazz club and other developing retail on Madison Avenue; additionally, there are a number of other historic structures awaiting adaptive reuse as retail or other complementary uses. Development of the site is also a way to continue preserving historic structures downtown, while concurrently eliminating non-historic structures in the area.



Looking northeast over the proposed site, with Toyota lot in the foreground; Wenzel Building in center.

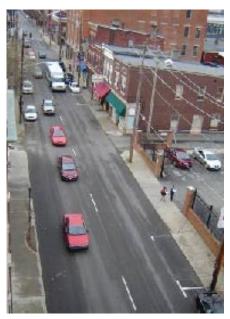
#### **CHALLENGES**

There are a number of identified challenges and potential obstacles – both current and in the future – to creating a successful civic square at this location.

#### Access & Linkages

While the presence of people and traffic around the square can generally be considered an asset, heavy traffic and car speed along the three-lane wide, one-way East 4th Street, as well as along East 5th Street, are a major challenge to creating the desired level of walkability around the square. 4th and 5th Street's status as a state route is also a potential hindrance to implementing the desired changes.

One-way traffic along Scott Boulevard is also somewhat of an impediment to walkability, but more so to future retail development along that street.



Looking west along E. 5th Street.



SUV blocking sidewalk along E. 4th Street.

Generally, the poor pedestrian experience on streets surrounding the site is a major challenge, due mainly to the aforementioned traffic, lack of safe crossing areas, and inadequate sidewalks.

Despite the numerous bus routes on streets bordering the site, the general lack of public transportation options within Covington and of direct transit access from some neighborhoods to the square is somewhat of an obstacle.

Truck access via the alleys to existing buildings' load zones might also be a concern if the site is developed as a public square.

#### **Comfort & Image**

The site and surrounding area, though revitalizing, still has a somewhat seedy feeling and reputation, due largely to its history as the city's red light district, the continued presence of some strip clubs, and a number of severely deteriorated buildings. While it is possible that there is a greater perception of danger than actual danger and that the area is actually quite safe, the perception alone is clearly a challenge.

The lack of adequate lighting in numerous areas in and around the site is a corollary concern and adds to the perception of the area as seedy and unsafe.

Poor visibility into the proposed site from some of the surrounding streets, particularly from the area around 5th Street by Oddfellows Hall, is also a potential barrier. How might people become aware of the square's presence from these areas, or from other areas of downtown for that matter?



Looking east along Ziegler's way.



Vacant buildings along East 5th Street.

#### **Planning & Implementation Process**

Two major anticipated challenges in this regard are sufficient buy-in from some property owners who would need to relocate to create the square, and the attendant property acquisition. Workshop participants and advisory board members also voiced a concern of achieving unity and a like-minded vision among the various stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Other major barriers to implementation were seen as a lack of available money and the need to coordinate public and private interests.

Lesser challenges include:

- Competition with other cities/attractions, namely with Cincinnati and Newport on the Levy;
- Existing homeless population downtown and around the square;
- Presence of non-historic and/or aesthetically unpleasing buildings on and around the site;
- · Aboveground utility lines unsightly; and
- No vegetation at present.





A wide array of potential users was brainstormed by the group, the most popular among them being, in order of ranking:

- 1) Library users
- 2) Residents
- 3) Office workers (city, private and IRS employees)
- 4) Students/school children
- 5) Youth
- 6) Senior citizens (three senior centers within walking distance)

Other likely regular users include:

- Church members
- Wedding district clientele (e.g. wedding parties for photos)
- Bicyclists
- Shoppers
- Convention center and hotel visitors
- Business school/college students
- Artists
- Latino groups
- WiFi users
- · Disabled individuals
- Elected officials
- Homeless
- Customers of and visitors to the Kenton County Courthouse and offices

A number of workshop participants noted that the square could and should draw from the full spectrum of the city's diverse population and should be welcoming to all groups, regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. As one person proclaimed, "Who don't you want, other than drug dealers?"

It was also noted during the workshop that, depending on how actively the square is managed and programmed (e.g. musical events, race start/finishes, etc.), it would become a destination unto itself – attracting its own users or "square-goers".

#### **POTENTIAL USES & ACTIVITIES**

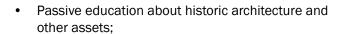
Workshop participants brainstormed a wide array of events and recreational and food-related activities that would attract a variety of people to the square. In general, there was a desire for a place that welcomed all sorts of people, uses and activities, in effect creating what one person termed a "living room" for the city, including:

#### **Cultural Activities**

- Musical performances (by far the most popular choice);
- Theater;
- · Outdoor movies:
- · High school band performances;
- Puppet show;
- · Cultural series;
- Multicultural events;
- Base for historical walking tours could do podcast walking tour;







- Classes/forums on history, architecture, art, etc.;
- Promote city functions; and
- Rotating seasonal garden displays
- Art exhibits and exhibitions.

#### Food-related activities

- Farmers' market (most widely requested);
- Ice cream (e.g. Graeter's);
- Mobile food vendors;
- Food events/festivals;
- · Wine and beer tasting;
- Eating/picnics; and
- Coffee/tea drinking.

#### **Recreational Activities**

- Roller and ice skating (highly requested);
- Activities for seniors games, etc.;





- Kids games painted on pavement (e.g. hopscotch);
- Games (e.g. cornhole, shuffleboard, chess, checkers, bocce);
- Arts-related activities (e.g. painting or dance classes);
- Merry-go-round/carousel;
- Bicycling/bike rentals;
- Sports;
- Celebrations (public & private);
- · Fitness classes; and
- · Shopping.

#### "Passive" Activities

- Reading;
- Sitting/relaxing; and
- · Socializing.





#### **MAJOR FEATURES AND AMENITIES**

Participants also imagined a number of major features and amenities that could be included in the square that would give it an identity, attract people and support the desired activities.

Decorative and interactive fountains/water features topped the list, "like in Lexington" one person commented; another person requested a water/fire fountain, "like at Pat O'Brian's in New Orleans"; yet another asked for "connecting fountains."

Public seating throughout the square in the form of benches, moveable tables and chairs, a quiet seating corner, etc. was the next most popular request.

Participants also expressed a strong desire for both a well-planted greenspace and paved or cobblestoned (yet also green) hardscape as part of the square. In general, "greening" of the square and the surrounding streetscape was advocated for, including:

- Trees;
- Flowers/gardens;
- Greenspace/lawn; and
- Window boxes on upper windows of adjacent buildings.

Other ideas for the hardscape included:

- Cobblestones (and limited access for vehicles in alleys); and
- · Historic markers.



Public art was also in high demand for the square, such as:

- Major sculpture(s);
- Incorporating mosaic art into the design of the space;
- Colorful murals; and/or
- Sculpture of General Covington

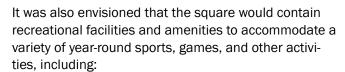


Other amenities relating to comfort include:

- Public restrooms;
- Shelter from weather for rainy/sunny day activities;
  - o Truck accessible shed for farmers and vendors
  - o Gazebo/shelter
- · Appropriate lighting; and
- Drinking fountains.







- Ice/roller skating rink;
- · Children's playground;
- Northern Kentucky park need to have Cornhole;
- Chess/checkers tables; and
- Bike rentals (to connect to river and other nearby popular riding destinations).

Furthermore, building on downtown's status as a cultural center for the area, cultural facilities for the square might include:

- · Big screen for outdoor movies;
- · Theater on the square; and
- · Concert/performance stage.

A smaller number of participants expressed interest in a tiered design for the square, though others noted that regardless, the space should be accessible to all (i.e. ADA compliant).





- Multi-level spaces, i.e. with steps, paths, gardens, trees, and grass;
- Lots of steps; and
- Varied surfaces (not all paved, some cobblestones/ pavers, some grass).

Numerous opportunities were envisioned for shops and businesses on and around the square and in the alleys, whether in the form of storefronts, open-air or enclosed markets, concession stands, and/or vendor booths/kiosks. Easily the most popular idea was for a variety of places to eat and drink, including:

- Open air café and/or other places for coffee & tea;
- Ice cream place; and
- Restaurants, a deli, and food carts.

Other business ideas included:

- Newsstand/bookstore/book stalls;
- Visitors center/shop;
- Open-air market, flowers;





- Art galleries;
- Specialty shops/vendors;
- Grocery store;
- · Clothing, gift shops;
- · Fitness center;
- Barbershop;
- Beauty salon; and
- Childcare services.

Utility infrastructure for the square might include:

- Hiding the exposed (overhead) utilities underground;
- Water and electricity access (i.e. for the farmers market and other events);
- Heated sidewalks and other surfaces in winter (using geothermal heat?) to minimize icy conditions;
   and
- Appropriate lighting.

Other requested amenities for the square included:

- Historical information (statues, plaques acknowledgement built into surfacing);
- Handicapped access throughout;
- Recycling & trash bins;
- Steps; and
- WiFi access throughout.

Finally, participants requested areas in the square that would be suitable for more passive activities, such as reading or merely sitting and relaxing.

#### **ACCESS & LINKAGES**

Workshop participants brainstormed a variety of ways to make the square easier to access by foot, bicycle and transit, and to increase its visibility from and connectivity to other places in Covington. For example, connections to the recreational and other activities along the river should be made, as well as to ethnic (e.g. African Americans, Hispanics) neighborhoods. It was also noted that the square should be ADA-friendly, i.e. accessible to mobility-impaired users, signs in Braille, etc.

Participants also expressed the need for flexibility in design that would limit access to the alleys in general while ensuring access on the alleyway off Madison for existing businesses, as well as for farmers and other vendors.

A quick note was also made for using the square as a base for horses and carriages that are already downtown.

#### Walkability/Traffic Calming

The greatest need in terms of access appeared to be for traffic-calming around the square. Participants suggested a range of options for slowing traffic down and making the environment more pedestrian-friendly, including:

- Bumping out corners (a bumpout has been installed at the corner of East 5th Street and Madison);
- Installing traffic islands on East 4th Street (if space allows);
- Changing one-way streets (e.g. Scott) to two-way, allowing for circumnavigation of and predictable traffic patterns around the square;





- Exploring the possibility of a modern roundabout at the corner of Madison and East 4th;
- Changing the paving (e.g. to cobblestones) on streets around the square to designate as pedestrian/slow-driving zone; alleys and interior spaces too:
- Marking the crosswalks more clearly;
- · Providing wider and more level sidewalks; and
- Repairing and lighting the alleys.

#### **Transit**

There was a general desire to improve public transportation to and from the square and to improve amenities for transit riders. Suggestions included:

- Creating trolleys or street car lines to/from Main-Strasse, Newport, and other areas of the city;
- Creating a shuttle between Covington and Newport, with a stop on the square;
- Improving bus routes to downtown from other parts of the city;
- · Covering bus stops and adding seating; and
- Exploring the possibility of light rail.

#### **Bicycles**

Bike lanes were requested for the roads connecting the square with other destinations and other bicycle paths and routes. Other bicycle infrastructure, like covered bike racks, were also requested. Another idea was introduce pedicabs to downtown for shopper, diners, and other visitors.

#### **Parking**

While some participants thought that parking downtown is not a big issue – given that there is plenty of onstreet, surface lot, and public garage parking – others expressed the desire for additional on-street parking on the streets surrounding the square, especially where it would facilitate traffic-calming. For example, there were numerous requests for back-in angle parking on East 4th Street, East 5th Street and Scott Boulevard. Participants believed that metered diagonal parking along the street edge would calm traffic somewhat and be convenient for shoppers and other short-term square-goers.

#### Connectivity

Workshop participants also brainstormed the top ten destinations for the square to connect to as:

- 1. Kenton County Library
- 2. Convention Center
- 3. Baker Hunt Arts & Cultural Canter
- 4. Riverfront/river/River walk/Covington Landing
- 5. Two Rivers Middle School
- 6. Pike Street/Arts District
- 7. Restaurants (ethnic and family)



Kenton County Public Library

- 8. Carnegie Visual and Performing Arts Center
- 9. Condos (the Ascent, PULSE and Pike Street Lofts)

#### 10. Churches

- Mother of God (Mutter Gottes)
- · Trinity Episcopal
- Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption

#### Additional destinations to connect to included:

- Wedding district
- MainStrasse
- Murals/artwork
- Courthouse
- Ice House
- Stadiums
  - o Paul Brown Stadium
- o Great American Ball Park
- · IRS buildings
- Suspension Bridge
- Hotels
- · City Hall
- Madison and Scott business districts
- The Avenue
- Abode
- · Duveneck Art and Cultural Center
- · Kenton County Courthouse
- Odd Fellows Hall
- · Historic districts
- · Farmers market
- · Senior centers
- · Underground Railroad Freedom Center
- · High-tech district
- · Social services
- · Licking Riverside neighborhood
- Office buildings



Two Rivers Middle School

- I-75 and I-71
- · Fitness centers

#### LAYOUT/DESIGN

Participants suggested a number of layout and design options for the square. There was general agreement about the following ideas:

- The ideal layout for the square would be a "great" square stretching diagonally from East 4th Street and Madison to East 5th Street and Scott Boulevard:
- The auto-related businesses should be relocated so their spaces could be used as parts of the square; the Kerry Collision Center property, for example, should be turned into a green space;
- The alleys should be highlighted throughout the square and as pedestrian access points into the square; as a result, they should have only limited access to auto traffic, such as for trucks loading and unloading.
- The Wenzel building at the center (aka "Black Oddfellows Hall") should be a focal point for the square

   it could be an interior year-round market or some sort of community space with a book store/café/info center in it.
- The Bilz Insurance building could be a market house in the future.
- The PNC bank should be relocated to provide the maximum amount of flexibility for the design and use of the square.
- More density of housing could be created around two quadrants of the block where buildings will remain

#### SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENTS

The following ideas were suggested as possible experiments and/or small-scale improvements that could be implemented within the next 6 months to test some of the concepts related above and to generate some momentum for the project:

- Develop a management structure for the square;
- Target favorable businesses for relocation;
- · Add better lighting in and around the square;
- Conduct a school art/mural project along one alley;
- Program events and performances, including:
  - o Musical performances
  - o A "Taste of Covington" event
  - Historic tours
  - o Scavenger hunt
- Ask PNC Bank if the farmers markets could relocate there;
- · Redo alleys: lighting, signs, paving
- Develop proposal drawings to share with various community stakeholders
- Host a community celebration dramatizing the proposed vision

#### POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

The following are suggestions of groups and institutions that could potentially help implement some of the proposed ideas:

- Artists
- Baker Hunt Arts & Cultural Center
- Behringer-Crawford Museum
- · Carnegie Arts & Cultural Center
- · Center for Great Neighborhoods
- Churches
- Corporex
- Covington Business Council (CBC)
- · Covington Neighborhood Collaborative
- · Covington Independent Schools
- Duveneck Arts & Cultural Center
- · Existing businesses
- Financial institutions
- · Friends of Covington
- · Gateway Community & Technical College
- Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
- Kenton County Public Library
- Merchants
- NKY Convention Center
- · Neighborhood groups
- Northern Kentucky University (NKU)
- Parochial schools
- Renaissance Covington, Inc.
- · Senior centers
- TANK (transit authority)
- Vision 2015

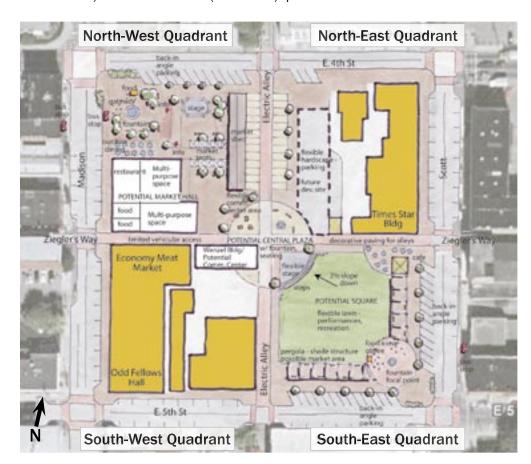
#### RECOMMENDATIONS

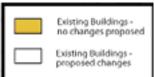
## 1. Design the square around the site's four quadrants:

- A "Market Square" on the PNC (northwest) site;
- A flexible area for new development and/or supportive facilities on the P&R Auto Repair/Times Star (northeast) quadrant;
- A "Green" square on the Kerry Collision Center (southeast) quadrant; and
- A conversion of the Wenzel Building into a combined community space and expanded Bessler's
  Market (i.e. with expanded produce, meat, and deli sections) on the Oddfellows (southwest) quadrant.

A "Central Plaza" would tie these four quadrants together. See below for more details on each area.

Each quadrant would be designed to support a variety of uses and activities. For example, the Market Square would include an outdoor farmers market at the least, possibly other market activities on other days, and potentially an indoor market activity as well. The Green would feature infrastructure that accommodates use as a play area for the nearby middle school, an ice skating rink in the winter, areas for smaller scale games (e.g. cornhole) and other activities, and a large flexible area event for concerts, outdoor movies, and other performances.







The PNC Bank (northwest) quadrant as seen from East 4th and Madison.

## 2. Develop the northwest quadrant/PNC Bank site as a Market Square.

Activities in this quadrant would revolve around market-related activities, including a once-a-week farmers market in and adjacent to a shed structure, as well as potential indoor market activities.

While the square may initially function as an openair market site, as the market grows and the square becomes a more active public space, a market shed structure should be built along the east side of the quadrant, parallel and adjacent to Electric Alley. This location would allow for easy truck access to East 4th Street and maximizes the flexibility of the site. The shed as laid out in the concept diagram could accommodate up to 26 vendors along a single double-loaded aisle. It could double as a venue for other types of markets on other days or in the off season – such as a holiday



Findlay Market's farmer shed, Cincinnati, OH

market – or could simply be used as a shady place to sit and people watch on a hot day.

As the market continues to grow and evolve, serious consideration should be given to converting the build-

ings currently occupied by Bilz Insurance into a flexible, food-oriented market building. Such a conversion might include a restaurant(s) or café(s) and fresh food businesses (e.g. bakery, fish shop) along the west side facing Madison, building on and adding to the success of the existing Economy Meat Market (Bessler's) and nearby restaurants; and a flexible market hall/event space on the east side facing the square, which could host an expanded farmers market one day and a wedding reception another.





Concept drawing of the proposed Market Square (northwest quadrant).



Bilz Insurance along Madison Avenue.



Back of the Bilz Insurance buildings facing the proposed square.

Any adaptive reuse of these two buildings should open up the east and north sides facing the square as much as possible, so that in temperate weather there is an indoor/outdoor quality that draws market customers and restaurant goers out onto the square and square users into the market building.

As the most prominent and visible of the four quadrants, the Market Square should also serve as a gateway to the overall square. Such a gateway should be defined by both the square itself (e.g. in the form of a fountain and other welcoming features at the edge of the square) as well as by the streets leading to and around the square, notably East 4th Street and Madison Avenue.

The bulk of the Market Square should be left as a fairly open and flexible hardscape, both to accommodate for market activities as well as for other cultural and recreational activities. Finally, the Market Square should include a relatively small performance space/stage, suitable for music at the farmers market, a podium for speeches/rallies, or for other events.



The PNC Bank (northwest) quadrant as seen from East 4th and Madison.



Activity spills out into the courtyard at the L.A. Farmers Market, Los Angeles, CA.



Historic arches in Columbus, OH announce the Short North District.

#### 3. Create a park-like Green on the southeast quadrant of the block.

(This is the current site of the Kerry Collision Center.) The Green would consist of a number of flexible elements:

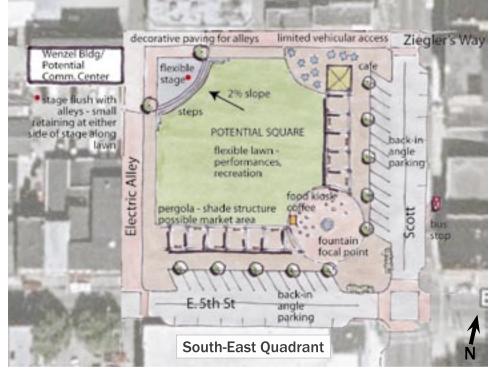
A large, flexible lawn that would serve as a play area for the nearby middle school during school days; a seating and informal recreation space for other times; a seating area (using movable chairs) for large performances or outdoor movies in the evenings and on weekends and holidays; and potentially an ice skating rink for part of the winter. A similar rink at Campus Martius in Detroit is laid down on top of the grass, which is then resodded when the rink is dismantled.

The lawn would slope almost imperceptibly downwards by 2% to a permanent stage in the corner of the Green

nearest the Central Square. Rather than a traditional raised stage, the slope allows for the stage to be three steps higher than the lawn, yet at the same time be flush with the alleys and Central Square. Small retaining walls would be necessary where the north and west edges of the lawn meet Ziegler's Way and Electric Alleys, respectively.



The Toyota/Kerry Collision (southeast) quadrant.





Concept diagram for the Green on the South-East Quadrant.



Skating rink at Campus Martius in Detroit, MI.

Framing the south and east sides of the Green would be two pergolas or other sort of shade structures for quiet seating, eating, game tables; these could be designed flexibly enough that they could double as a place for market and other activities in the event the quadrant designated as the Market Square is unavailable.

A number of eating options should be made available on the periphery of the Green as well, whether ice cream or lunch carts or a small, freestanding café/kiosk near the Times Star Building.

As the corner of the quadrant nearest Scott Boulevard and East 5th Street serves as a gateway to the Green and the overall square, a fountain, sculpture, or other focal point should be located to catch people's eye and welcome them in.



Activities for kids at the annual "Paris Plage" in Paris, France.



Inflatable outdoor movie screen.



Movable seating at Bryant Park in New York City.

## 4. Use the centrally-located Wenzel Building as a Community Center and activity base for the square.

The southwest quadrant of the square, dominated by existing businesses and the restored Oddfellows Hall, also boasts the Wenzel Building, a former pickle factory and one-time "Black Oddfellows Hall". The location of this building is ideal for use as a multi-purpose community center and meeting place (there are no proposed changes to other buildings or businesses on this site). Sitting at the center of the city block and intersection of the alleys, the Wenzel Building would serve as the heart of the square. There are numerous activities that could occur in this building that would draw users into the space at different times of the day throughout the year (e.g. after-school programs, library activities, community meetings, etc.). The building might also serve as a "backstage" area for performers on the adjacent stage; as a place to check out games or other recreational equipment; and as a base for historical walking tours.



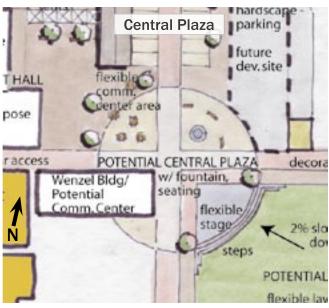
Fountain at Ghiradelli Square in San Francisco, CA.





South and east facades of the Wenzel Building.

A Central Plaza should be created adjacent to the Wenzel Building, incorporating the interior corners of all four quadrants and tying together the Market Square, the Green, and the Community Center. This plaza would serve as a central gathering place as well as space for Community Center activities to spill out onto. The Central Plaza is also an ideal place for an interactive fountain that can serve as a focal point for the overall square.

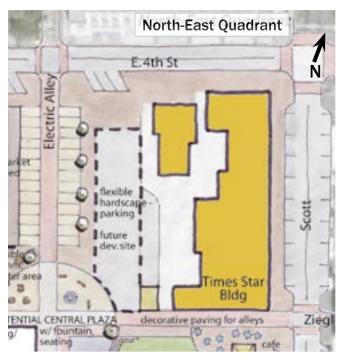


Concept diagram for the central plaza at the intersection of Ziegler's Way and Electric Alley.



## 5. Create a flexible hardscape on the west side of the northeast quadrant.

This would preserve the existing historic buildings, including the Times Star Building, while using the site of the one-story J&R Auto Repair shop as part of the square. This site could serve as spill-over space for the Market Square, including potential customer parking, and would be essential to creating the Central Plaza that links the Market Square, Green, and Community Center. In the future, part of this quadrant (denoted by the dashed lines in the concept drawing) could become a site for complementary, mixed-use development, including retail or food-related uses on the ground floor and housing or offices above.



Concept diagram for the north-east quadrant.

## 6. Phase development of the square by quadrant.

The overall concept for the square allows for the likelihood that site acquisition will not happen all at once and may take some time. For example, if the PNC Bank site is the first to be acquired, programming and construction of at least some elements of the Market Square can begin. The idea is to allow the square to develop somewhat organically over time, in line with existing political and economic possibilities.

Additionally, the concept allows for each quadrant to be developed in its own right if some properties prove unfeasible for acquisition and conversion into part of the overall square. Accordingly, for the two primary quadrants, the Market Square and the Green, there is potential for each to accommodate at least some of the other's activities in the event one of the two sites is unavailable for development of the square. For example, the Market Square could accommodate many of the games, performances, and other activities envisioned for the Green. Likewise, the concept of the Green is such that it can accommodate market activity along the pergola/shade structure, as well as performances, recreation, and other uses.



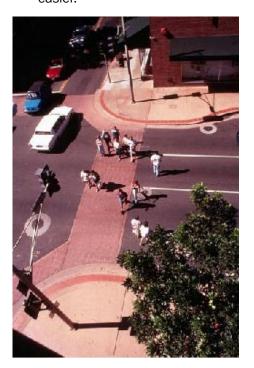


#### 7. Improve access to the site.

Regardless of the order and manner in which it is developed, safe and easy access to the square must be assured to draw potential and frequent users. To begin with, a number of specific traffic-calming measures should be undertaken, including:

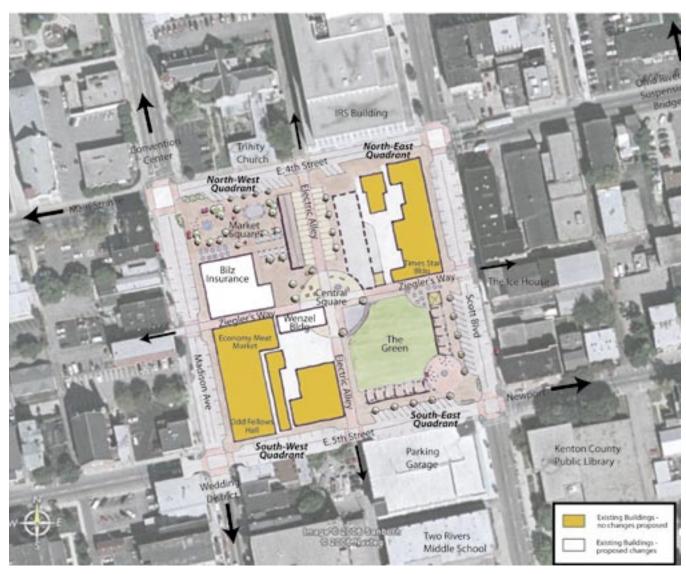
- Convert Scott Boulevard to two-way traffic to facilitate circumnavigation of the square, calm traffic, and help to catalyze retail along the street. A context sensitive traffic study should be conducted to ensure proper traffic circulation and movement;
- Install back-in angle parking along East 4th and 5th Streets and on Scott Boulevard adjacent to the square. This type of parking has been shown to both calm traffic and be a safe and easy way to park. A parking study should be conducted to analyze the impact of the development on the current availability of parking;
  - ON OFFICE AND THE

- Cobblestone or similarly resurface the alleys crossing through the square; extend this surface across the streets bordering the square to serve as midblock crossways and improve visibility and connectivity to the square;
- Restrict access to the alleys except for service vehicles on Tobacco Alley off Madison Avenue;
- Install bus shelters with seating on Madison Avenue that triangulates with other amenities and/or activities occurring on the square;
- Install crosswalks and bumpouts at all four intersections around the square to calm traffic and make crossing the street to the square safer and easier.



## 8. Create physical and programmatic connections to the square to attract visitors on the local and regional level.

This might be accomplished in a variety of ways, from simple, yet well-placed signage and wayfinding; to walking, biking and transit connections between the square and other local and regional destinations; to a marketing campaign through the local tourism board or other partners; to programming activities that appeal to a specific constituency (e.g. salsa dancers, cornhole players, wedding district clientele). The diagram below illustrates some of the more evident potential local connections and partnerships.



Potential local connections and partnerships around and near the square.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **Short-Term Implementation**

- 1. Create a weekend-long "block party" to pilot the idea of the space as a civic square for the city and galvanize support from potential partners. Such an event would entail partnering with organizations, businesses, and individuals from around Covington to program large and small performances, events, games, contests, etc. along with the best of regional food and drink, over a two-day weekend. Such an event should naturally include the Saturday farmers market, if at all possible.
- 2. Conduct a feasibility study of moving the existing farmers market to the square one day a week and of eventually expanding market activities into a shed and market hall. Shifting the Saturday farmers market from MainStrasse over to the PNC Bank portion of the square would be an ideal opportunity to begin to activate the space as well as to grow the market and make it more of a central gathering place for the entire city. However, the feasibility of such a move, as well as the larger possibilities for the site, needs to be thoroughly examined.
- 3. Conduct a traffic study focused on the streets around the square to accurately assess the effect the potential traffic calming changes discussed above would have on traffic flow and pedestrian safety. Additionally, a parking study should be conducted to determine the impact proposed changes would have on existing parking.
- 4. Conduct more extensive outreach and public input into the process. As the concept development progresses and moves towards site acquisition and design, it will be crucial to reach out to individuals and organizations that have not been part of the process to date, but who will be important potential users of the square. Potential partners



Gyumri Plaza, Armenia - Not much going on.



Gyumri Plaza, Armenia - City-wide party!

who were brainstormed and listed above should be among those who are solicited for input. Outreach may take the form of meetings or phone calls with individual, additional public meetings, and/or targeted meetings for specific stakeholder groups (e.g. churches, IRS employees, local business owners). Similarly, stakeholders that have been involved in the process thus far should continue to be engaged to ensure their long-term buy-in and ownership.

5. Develop a Times Star Speakers Bureau. City staff and advisory board members should develop and present this report/plan in the form of a Power-Point presentation to as many civic groups and organizations, political leaders and potential funders as possible.

#### LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION

- Start relocating existing businesses and conducting site acquisition. The long-term relocation and acquisition of the following five businesses will be key to developing the overall vision of the square:
  - PNC Bank property on southwest
  - Kerry Collision Center
  - P&R Auto property
  - Bilz Insurance
  - Wenzel Building

As mentioned above, however, this is not to say that a great square could not be created from any single – or combination of – quadrant(s). Individual quadrants of the square can and should be developed as relocation and site acquisition progresses.

## 2. Evolve the steering committee into a more formal management structure.

We like to say that 80% of the success of a place hinges on management. That is certainly the case with a project such as this, where there would be a number of public and private elements at play, including the farmers market, possible indoor market, community center, and activities and programming on the square. There is a good chance that the Green, if developed, would be managed by the City of Covington through the Parks Department. The market(s), on the other hand, would most likely be privately managed by a non-profit 501(c)(3) entity. Increasing numbers of public spaces today are privately managed, from commercial districts (e.g. chambers of commerce and BIDS); to parks

(e.g. friends of groups and conservancies); to public squares (e.g. downtown organizations); and to public markets and farmers markets.

Given that the proposed square has components of each of these public spaces, in addition to a community center - and that the success of the square hinges on the careful (yet entrepreneurial) coordination of these elements—we recommend that one organization function as an umbrella management entity for the entire square. Such an organization could coordinate with Parks in their management of the Green; manage leases for the community center, indoor, shed and open-air markets as well as any other commercial properties facing the square; and oversee the potential development of a mixed-use project on the northeast quadrant. It would also be directly responsible for programming, marketing and promotions, maintenance, and ongoing development of the square. Security could be handled by the city, but could potentially be private as well. The umbrella management entity would need to work closely with all of the elements to minimize conflicts (e.g. parking, loading and unloading); at the same time, maximize triangulation of activities and uses; and create economic and operational efficiencies for all parties.

Develop a long-term strategic financing plan. This
will increase the likelihood that when opportunities
arise to develop another part of the square, funding will be in place or within reach, thus minimizing
delays.

The city has already secured \$1 million for planning the square. Some of this has already been spent and some will need to be spent on traffic, parking and market feasibility studies, for design work, and for continued outreach. Given the possibility that

not all of the \$1 million will be spent on planning, it should be determined whether some of these funds might go towards property acquisition.

As the square will likely be developed in stages, it follows that it will be both necessary and prudent to access different sources of funds for different quadrants and elements of the square. For example, the development of a shed for the farmers market might be partially funded through USDA monies; improving access to the square for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders might be funded through state or federal DOT dollars; development of a mixed-use structure(s) on the northeast quadrant might be privately financed; and the conversion of the Toyota property might be funded through city, county, or state open-space funds.

Accordingly, possible sources of financing might include:

- · City and/or county funds;
- State and/or federal grants;
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for site acquisitions and construction;
- Local fundraising campaign;
- Private investment from local businesses (i.e. developers) around the square and potentially on the square and/or other private entities; and
- Infill development (e.g. market/restaurant/ event space and/or potential mixed-use development) on northeast quadrant.

#### DESIGNING AND MANAGING PUBLIC SPACES SUCCESSFULLY

And while the appropriate design, location and physical features of the space are important in such an endeavor, proper ongoing management is more important.

As discussed above, successful public spaces do not happen by accident. Despite the apparent intangibility of the elements of good places (i.e. comfort and image, access and linkages, uses and activities, and sociability), they can indeed be planned and created with predictable results. A well-used public square must have the foundation of a good design that addresses these elements. This will require a substantial capital investment to assure that a quality, functional space is created that will be a source of community pride.

And while the appropriate design, location and physical features of the space are important in such an endeavor, proper ongoing management is more important. Indeed, there needs to be a substantial commitment at the outset for ongoing operation and management of a square. This is more than just making sure that litter is swept up and periodic security occurs. Not only is such a space bound to be boring, it is likely to be unsafe as well – despite the security guard.

The principal public space management tasks are described below:

**Maintenance.** The more used and loved a public space is, the more maintenance it requires. But regular cleaning and repair of the space to high standards more than repays the cost. Prompt attention to items that could be easily deferred, such as a broken drinking fountain or removal of graffiti, says that someone is in charge, that the place is respected, and that the public is protected. Landscape and horticultural requirements may require special attention if plantings are extensive, or if rare plants are present. This work falls well within the usual property management tasks, and would be done in any case.

**Security and Hospitality.** If a space is well-designed, security can be visible and comforting without being intrusive. The more that people feel secure in a space, the more users the space attracts, and the more secure the space will be. Security and maintenance personnel should be ambassadors, too: if people feel "hosted" and "welcomed," they don't feel the need to be "protected," because to a large extent the space becomes self-policing. Obviously, this is a delicate balance to strike. Public facilities can become targets for the homeless or malcontents, so vigilance on this front can never be let down; at the same time, however, a public space cannot

be successful if it feels like an armed camp with no places to sit. Security guards who have a friendly demeanor, and are informed and helpful to the public, can go a long way toward maintaining the balance.

**Programming**. Once the basic "clean, safe, and friendly" needs are met, programming the space becomes not only possible, but much easier, and the economic potential of the space can be realized. "Programming" refers to the wide variety of planned activities and to all the facilities and equipment related to them: furnishing the space appropriately, for example, with chairs that can be moved from sun to shade and back; operating a retail program, with vending carts or a seasonal cafe; producing a regular concert series or a onetime festival; hosting a community gathering; and operating a farmers market. Programming a public space successfully is an entrepreneurial art. However, "programming" does not necessarily imply intensive staffing. It can be something as simple as providing benches or installing a historical plaque or exhibit. Much programming can be retail operations that are contracted to vendors, whether with carts, space for an outdoor cafe, or through retail operations in buildings that open out to the square; retail activities can produce revenue, and in some cases quite a lot.

Marketing and Promotion. Promoting the events and activities that take place in the public space is an important adjunct to programming, particularly for a space being built or programmed for the first time. While particular events will always need to be advertised, the most successful public spaces can reach a point where the space is so well-known and sought-after that no marketing is necessary. But for most spaces, and especially early in a new public-space management program, a commitment to marketing and promotion, and the special skills it requires, is needed. Like programming, however, this is an activity that can be contracted out, or provided by a downtown improvement organization as part of the publicity for a larger district.

Coordination with Adjacent Retail Uses. The public spaces and the surrounding ground floor commercial uses – including public markets – should be seamlessly integrated. The public should flow from outside to inside and vice versa with as few barriers as possible. The activities of the restaurant and retail tenants should spill right into the plaza and streets, and the outdoor activities and circulation should move smoothly through the buildings. The management entity, therefore, should be responsible for retail and restaurant recruitment as well as oversee (without curtailing creative ideas) and coordinate the tenants' interior and storefront designs, signage, and outdoor activities when they affect the public spaces.